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Chairman: Mr. STEIN (Germany)
(Vice-Chairman)

later: Mr. SENGWE (Zimbabwe)
(Chairman)

(Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 119: SCALE OF ASSESSMENTS FOR THE APPORTIONMENT OF THE EXPENSES OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 116: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1996-1997 (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 118: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued)

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

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In the absence of Mr. Sengwe (Zimbabwe), Mr. Stein (Germany), Vice Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 119: SCALE OF ASSESSMENTS FOR THE APPORTIONMENT OF THE EXPENSES OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued) (A/50/11/Add.2)

1. Mrs. BASHIR (Sudan) supported the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The fact that certain countries were not fulfilling their obligations towards the Organization was the main factor which prevented it from carrying out its mission to the best of its ability. If the Member States did not pay their assessments, it would serve no purpose to revise the scale of assessments. Capacity to pay must remain the basic criterion for the apportionment of the Organization's expenses, but it must be re-evaluated periodically to take into account the effect of economic changes. The notion of relative capacity to pay should be introduced in order to reflect more accurately the disparities which existed between countries and thereby ensure the fairness and justice of the system; that was not possible if only national income was taken into account. It might be useful to base the scale in part on per capita income. A six-year base period would allow for the greatest objectivity. As for the very real effect of conversion rates, it was market rates which determined the burden represented by debt-servicing. That factor, which limited many countries' capacity to pay, must be taken into account. As for setting floor and ceiling rates, such an idea was contrary to the very principle of sharing assessments based on capacity to pay.

2. Mr. Sengwe (Zimbabwe) took the Chair.

3. Mr. ELMONTASER (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) also supported the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica. Despite attempts by the Committee on Contributions to find a methodology for determining the scale of assessments that would meet the wishes of all Member States, it was unfortunately clear that there were still many areas of disagreement. In that regard, he reaffirmed that the Committee on Contributions was a group of experts, whose role was primarily a technical one. The current methodology contained many factors of distortion; the most serious was the application of a ceiling, which was damaging to many developing countries, and it was time to consider its abolition. As for the base period, a compromise should be found between too short a period, which would result in sudden variations, and too long a period, which would have the effect of freezing the scale.

4. The General Assembly had repeatedly reaffirmed that capacity to pay was the fundamental criterion for determining the scale of assessments. However, the Committee on Contributions, when considering the next scale of assessments, must take into account all factors which affected a Member State's capacity to pay, for example, economic sanctions and coercive measures imposed on it by certain other Member States. Such measures had cost his country $18 billion from 1992 to 1995 - not to mention the human and psychological damage caused. Exchange rates were another problem which hampered payment of his country's contributions

since the risk of having its dollar assets frozen required it to have recourse to buying an intermediate currency list; that added to its burden.

5. He hoped that the Committee on Contributions would succeed in overcoming the difficulties which prevented it from establishing a better scale. He also hoped that the double standard would be applied when States requested exemptions under Article 19 of the Charter concerning their right to vote.

6. Mrs. SEALY MONTEITH (Jamaica) expressed support for the statements made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and on behalf of the members of the Caribbean Community. Although the question of the scale of assessment had been thrown into sharp relief by the very difficult financial situation faced by the United Nations, the origin of the current crisis lay elsewhere, namely, in the failure of some Member States to pay their arrears and assessed contributions promptly and without conditions. At the same time, she recognized the need for a careful examination of the existing formula for contributions.

7. She agreed with the Committee on Contributions on the importance of promoting stability in the scale methodology; that should not, however, imply rigidity. It was essential to continue to apply the principle of capacity to pay based on estimates of national income while taking into account any necessary adjustments. In addition, any change in the base period should contribute to greater stability. The debt-burden factor should continue to be taken into account and low per capita income relief should be maintained. Valid arguments had been put forward for changes to the current floor rate, which penalized many small developing countries. The recommendation of the Committee on Contributions in that regard was worth considering.

8. Mr. VALLE (Brazil) speaking on behalf of the countries which were members of the Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR) (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay), as well as Bolivia and Chile, associated himself with the statements made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and on behalf of the Rio Group. He pointed out that the problem of the Organization's financial crisis - which could only be resolved through the political determination of the Member States - should not be confused with that of establishing a scale of assessments, which was a purely technical problem. The question before the Committee was exclusively that of the scale of assessments for contributions to the regular budget.

9. Since it did indeed simplify calculations, gross national product was a better indicator of income than net national income. It was, however, merely a starting point for determining capacity to pay. The base period must be long enough to allow for consideration of all the variables affecting a country's economic situation and, therefore, capacity to pay. The Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Working Group on the Implementation of the Principle of Capacity to Pay had emphasized that shifting the base period in itself had led to some anomalies. Since the Committee on Conferences had suggested that the base period should be a multiple of the scale period, it would seem advisable to opt for a base period of nine years: that would not greatly change the scale, a fact which was particularly important in view of the gradual phasing out of the scheme of limits.

10. The Working Group had been right to stress that the choice of exchange rate was a crucial element. The most appropriate exchange rates would seem to be market exchange rates, although for some countries it would be desirable to use price-adjusted rates of exchange, as recommended by the Committee on Contributions. The external debt-burden adjustment was an integral part of the methodology and should be maintained in the future. The negative impact of external debt on capacity to pay could not be denied. For example, in 1995 the total external debt of the MERCOSUR countries reached US$ 300 billion; the share of some of its member States represented more than 400 per cent of the total of their export income or up to 60 per cent of their gross national product. The magnitude of those figures indicated the invalidity of arguments intended to minimize the importance of the debt burden and its impact on real capacity to pay.

11. The low per capita income adjustment was another integral component of the methodology. However, in examining the low per capita income adjustment formula to be applied to the next scale, he wished to highlight the caution with which the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme used the criterion of per capita income. In order to ensure equity for a group of some 50 smaller countries, it would be a good idea to follow the recommendation of the Committee on Contributions and substantially lower the floor while ensuring that such a step would not harm other developing countries, particularly the least developed countries. While the introduction of corrections to the floor would make for more equity and justice, the lowering of the ceiling would have the opposite effect.

12. He reminded the Committee that the General Assembly had decided, in resolution 48/223 B, to eliminate the scheme of limits completely by the period 1998-2000. Paragraph 2 of that resolution, which stated that in phasing out the scheme of limits, the allocation of additional points resulting therefrom to developing countries benefiting from its application should be limited to 15 per cent of the effect of the phase-out, remained applicable. On the issue of rounding, his delegation supported the recommendation of the Committee on Contributions that future scales should be carried to three decimal places.

13. Mr. AYEWAH (Nigeria) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and stressed that there should be no linkage between the scale of assessments and the financial situation of the Organization, which, as was well known, was due to the failure of some Member States - and in particular the major contributors - to pay their contributions in full and on time. In examining the question of the scale of assessments, it was important to bear in mind that capacity to pay should be the fundamental criterion for apportioning the expenses of the Organization. Capacity to pay, however, could not be determined on the basis of national income alone. Consideration should also be given to the other socio-economic factors cited in resolution 43/223. Debt-burden adjustment should continue to be used; the floor rate should be lowered whereas the ceiling should be kept at its current level. His Government, which had paid its assessed contributions in full and on time, called on other Member States to do likewise without resorting to the unacceptable practice of attaching conditions to the payment of their assessed contributions.

14. Mr. SYCHOU (Belarus) said that the scale of assessments was subjected to heavy scrutiny by the Member States because the Organization's financial operation and stability depended on it. A study of the evolution since 1946 of the various elements for formulating the scale would suffice to bring home that fact. Unfortunately, instead of simplifying the methodology, the numerous and often politically-inspired changes that had been made to the scale had detached it from the principle of capacity to pay. It was in order to reverse that trend that the General Assembly, by its resolution 49/19, had established the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Working Group on the Implementation of the Principle of Capacity to Pay; that principle remained the fundamental criterion for drawing up the scale of assessments for the regular budget.

15. The scale of assessments was supposed to reflect the evolution - and the sometimes radical and unpredictable transformation - of the economic situation in the Member States. Any attempt to assess a country's capacity to pay using inflexible criteria was therefore doomed to failure. The desire to draw up a simple, transparent and stable scale was, admittedly, laudable, but confusing stability with inertia and failing to take account of reality would not resolve any of the problems that had built up.

16. Because a number of new peacekeeping operations had been deployed since 1992, the total arrears which Belarus owed to the Organization had exceeded reasonable limits. In its decisions 48/472 and 49/470, the General Assembly had taken account of that fact by ruling that Article 19 of the Charter would not apply. That decision and the gradual inclusion of Belarus in Group C of the scale of contributions for peacekeeping operations showed that the objective difficulties of Belarus had been taken into account. Nevertheless, the country's assessed contributions for peacekeeping operations would not correspond to its capacity to pay until 1997, and in the case of the regular budget not until 1998, provided that the scheme of limits was completely phased out with effect from the first year of the application of the next scale. Belarus would nevertheless continue to make every effort to honour its financial obligations, as evidenced by its recent payment of almost $3 million to the regular budget.

17. His delegation was in favour of lowering the floor rate to 0.001 per cent - a step which would demonstrate the collective will of Member States to eliminate a distorting factor - and maintaining the ceiling rate at 25 per cent. Low per capita income adjustment should continue to be applied while the proposals referred to in paragraph 44 of the report of the Committee on Contributions were studied. With regard to the base period, it would be preferable to opt for a period of three years in order to obtain a scale that was both stable and took account of the development of the economic situation of Member States.

18. His delegation favoured using the market exchange rates published by the International Monetary Fund in its International Financial Statistics Yearbook. Moreover, it believed that debt-burden adjustment should be based on data that reflected the actual principal repayments rather than the overall level of debt. Finally, it advocated the complete phase-out of the scheme of limits with effect from 1998.

19. Mr. GDAIA (Saudi Arabia) said that his delegation shared the views expressed by Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, since capacity to pay should be the fundamental criterion for determining the scale of assessments. It believed, however, that gross national product and average per capita income did not necessarily reflect a country's actual level of development. It also supported the recommendation of the Group of 77 that the floor should be lowered to 0.001 per cent so that the assessed contributions of the least developed countries would be commensurate with their capacity to pay, provided that it was not to the detriment of other developing countries.

20. The upheavals which had taken place in the world had had an impact on international relations and on the activities of the United Nations system. More than ever before, the Organization's effectiveness depended on the extent to which Member States honoured their financial commitments. The problems currently being faced in that area were due first and foremost to the failure of certain countries to pay their contributions in full and on time and not to distortions in the methodology for determining the scale of assessments. For its part, Saudi Arabia, which was one of the founding Members of the United Nations, had always paid its assessed contributions in full, despite the difficulties which it had been experiencing since the Gulf War.

21. Mr. AWAAD (Egypt) said that his delegation largely shared the views expressed by Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The financial crisis of the United Nations was first and foremost a political one, which was due to the fact that the country in arrears on the payment of the highest assessed contribution refused to honour its obligations under Article 17 of the Charter, and to the accumulated arrears of several other countries. For its part, Egypt was proud to be among those Member States which were up to date in the payment of their contributions. While it was prepared to agree to slight modifications to the methodology for determining the scale of assessments in order to take account of the difficulties faced by certain countries, including the least developed countries and countries with economies in transition, it believed that there was no need to radically transform a system which had been in place for decades.

22. Egypt supported most of the recommendations of the Committee on Contributions, on the understanding that capacity to pay must remain the fundamental criterion of the methodology for determining the scale of assessments. It supported a statistical base period of six years and the use of estimates of gross national product to measure the income of States. Moreover, use should continue to be made of the foreign debt statistics provided by the World Bank for the purpose of calculating the debt-burden adjustment, since that adjustment should be based on data which reflected actual repayments of principal rather than on a percentage of the outstanding debt. The low per capita income adjustment should be continued for the time being.

23. Whatever the methodology used, the floor should be lowered and the scale of assessments carried to three decimal places. With regard to the lowering of the ceiling, Egypt supported the proposals of the Group of 77 and China; it did not believe that such a measure could be implemented in the current circumstances. Finally, with reference to the decisions taken by the General Assembly to reduce the statistical base period from ten to seven and a half years and to phase out

by 50 per cent the effects of the scheme of limits with a view to its complete phasing out in the scale, it should be noted that fundamental changes had already been made in the scale of assessments.

24. Mr. BHAKTA SHRESTHA (Nepal) said that his delegation fully supported the recommendation of the Committee on Contributions that the Comoros should be permitted to vote during the fifty-first session of the General Assembly.

25. Concerning the report under consideration, Nepal associated itself with the position expressed by the Group of 77 and China and welcomed the fact that the Committee on Contributions had been largely successful in elaborating a simpler and more transparent scale methodology based on reliable, verifiable and comparable data. Like many other delegations, Nepal wished to reiterate its view that the principle of capacity to pay must remain the fundamental criterion for determining the scale. The contradictions and distortions within and outside of the methodology, such as those which resulted from cross funding at the cost of troop contributors to peacekeeping operations, needed to be corrected in order to strengthen the financial base of the Organization. Some sort of mechanism needed to be developed so that countries in arrears would pay their dues in full and on time. Such measures, however, could never become a substitute for genuine political will on the part of Member States.

26. It was now clear, moreover, that the current floor assessment rate resulted in a serious departure from the principle of capacity to pay for a number of smaller Member States from developing countries. His delegation therefore welcomed the recommendation of the Committee on Contributions that the current floor should be lowered to correspond to the actual share of the adjusted national income of such States, subject to a minimum assessment rate of 0.001 per cent. His delegation hoped that the General Assembly would take up the matter at its current session, as the Group of 77 and China had recommended.

27. Mr. WILMOT (Ghana) agreed with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The financial crisis facing the United Nations was not due to the scale of assessments but rather to the refusal of certain countries to honour their financial obligations to the Organization. Member States must demonstrate their support for the United Nations not only by promoting reforms but, more importantly, by paying their contributions in full and on time, as Ghana was endeavouring to do, despite the grave economic difficulties with which it was confronted.

28. The fundamental principle governing the apportionment of the expenses of the Organization must remain the capacity to pay of States. Ghana had noted the recommendation of the Committee on Contributions that each country's share should be calculated on the basis of its gross national product rather than its gross domestic product and it would join with other delegations to work for a consensus on the matter. With regard to the length of the base period, his delegation would prefer a base period of six rather than three years. On the issue of conversion rates, it appeared that market exchange rates yielded more accurate results, but Ghana had taken note of the recommendation that price-adjusted or other rates of exchange should be used in the case of States for which the use of market exchange rates caused excessive fluctuations or distortions in income.

29. The existence of a floor rate was inconsistent with the principle of capacity to pay and detrimental to some small States; that anomaly needed to be addressed. With regard to the ceiling rate, there were no grounds for lowering it. Debt-burden adjustment should be maintained insofar as the debt burden eroded the capacity to pay of many developing countries. Finally, as the Committee on Contributions had recommended, a third decimal place should be added to the scale of contributions of Member States.

30. Mr. SIRIWA (Papua New Guinea) concurred with the statements made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, on the one hand, and of the island States that were members of the South Pacific Forum, on the other. He welcomed the recommendation of the Committee on Contributions that, in future scales of assessment, all Member States whose share of adjusted national income was less than the current floor of 0.01 per cent should be assessed at their actual share of adjusted income, subject to a minimum assessment rate of 0.001 per cent. Such a decision would allow a number of developing countries, in particular small island States and the least developed countries, to be assessed on a basis corresponding more closely to their capacity to pay. In accordance with resolution 1223 B, capacity to pay should remain the fundamental criterion for the apportionment of the Organization's expenses among the Member States, it being understood that no change in the scale of contributions should result in an increase in the burden borne by the developing countries.

31. Mr. AKPLOGAN (Benin) supported the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and reaffirmed that the critical financial situation of the Organization was unrelated to the scale of assessments: it resulted from the fact that certain States, particularly some of those with the largest assessed contributions, did not discharge their financial obligations under the Charter in full and, above all, without conditions. In order to ensure respect for the principle of capacity to pay, the minimum rate of assessment should be set at 0.001 per cent for future scales and the ceiling rate should be kept at its current level. As many delegations had pointed out, the cumulative effects of an unduly long base period, of the scheme of limits, of the per capita income adjustment and of other elements had raised the assessments of the developing countries to levels which exceeded their capacity to pay. For that reason, the reform of the scale methodology should be comprehensive and should be the subject of a consensus. Benin had paid its contributions in full and it called on all other Member States to do the same in order to provide a sound financial basis for the United Nations and to ensure the success of the current reforms.

32. Mr. MONAYAIR (Kuwait) also stressed that the scale methodology had little to do with the financial crisis of the Organization, which was due above all to the fact that certain Member States did not honour their commitments. For its part, his country was up to date with the payment of its contributions.

33. The fundamental criterion in determining the apportionment of the Organization's expenses should be capacity to pay, and account should be taken of the specific circumstances of each country. Kuwait was not opposed to a reduction in the base period, which might be either identical to, or double, the scale period; the essential point was that it should ensure the stability of the scale while reflecting the economic development of each country. Gross national product might be retained as an indicator of capacity to pay. The scale would

be more precise if the assessment rate were calculated to an additional decimal place. The floor might be reduced, but there was no reason to lower the ceiling. In any event, a revision of the scale should not in any circumstances result in the imposition of a greater burden on the developing countries.

34. The Committee on Contributions should continue its efforts, on the basis of the clear guidelines given to it by the General Assembly in resolution 48/223, to improve the scale methodology by making it as objective and accurate as possible.

AGENDA ITEM 116: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1996-1997 (continued) (A/50/7/Add.16; A/51/7/Add.1; and A/C.5/50/57/Add.1)

35. Mr. KELLY (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, as well as of Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, recalled that the appropriation level approved by the General Assembly in resolution 50/214, which included savings of $104 million during the biennium 1996-1997, represented a compromise which the European Union had supported in the interests of consensus, although it attached the greatest importance to the budgetary procedures provided for in resolution 41/213.

36. In its second report on the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 (A/51/7/Add.1), the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions had made a number of very pertinent comments on the measures proposed by the Secretary-General, in document A/C.5/50/57/Add.1, in order to address the basic challenge of achieving savings of $104 million without affecting the full implementation of mandated programmes and activities. The Advisory Committee had pointed out in paragraphs 8 and 9 of its report that the Secretary-General had nowhere indicated exactly the budgetary consequences of the measures proposed or what the actual impact on programme delivery would be.

37. The European Union believed that it would have been desirable to proceed in a more structured fashion in order to achieve the savings requested. As the Advisory Committee had recommended in an earlier report on the matter (A/50/7/Add.16, para. 40), a review of programmes should be undertaken in order to avoid a general deterioration in the quality of the Organization's activities. For its part, the European Union was ready to participate in such a general review of the programmes and priorities of the Organization, an appropriate occasion for which might be the forthcoming discussions on the proposed medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001. Some intergovernmental bodies, in particular some of the regional economic commissions, had embarked on a review of programmes. That was a step in the right direction and one that should precede any budget reduction exercise. It should be undertaken on a general basis, with a view to the preparation of budget estimates for future bienniums.

38. It was primarily for the Secretary-General to determine how a legislative mandate could best be implemented, with the help of efficiency reviews which should become a continuing management tool. As the Advisory Committee stated in paragraph 22 of document A/51/7/Add.1, the Secretariat should undertake a critical review in order to identify those outputs that had originated from

within the Secretariat and those that had been specifically requested by the competent intergovernmental body. The European Union also concurred with the related comments made by the Advisory Committee in the latter half of paragraph 32 and in paragraph 33 of its report.

39. The issue of vacancies was central to the current exercise. Resolution 50/214 had provided for an average vacancy rate of 6.4 per cent in 1996-1997, but, as the Advisory Committee indicated in paragraph 26 of its report, the vacancy rate for Professional posts was 6.9 per cent on 31 December 1995. It would have been desirable for that information to have been made available to the General Assembly at the earliest possible time. It would also be useful to have clarification on the extent to which vacancies were used to accommodate the costs of additional mandates. In that connection, the European Union wished to recall the provisions of paragraph 4 of resolution 50/231, as well as its earlier statements on the matter; it was prepared to deal with the issue of additional mandates in the context of the first performance report, as provided for in resolution 41/213. That document should, moreover, indicate the funding basis, both budgetary and extrabudgetary, for all posts, with a breakdown by Department.

40. Despite the reservations it had about several of the measures proposed by the Secretary-General to achieve the mandated savings of $104 million, the European Union felt itself bound by the consensus which had preceded the adoption of resolution 50/214. It was in that spirit that it concurred with the recommendation of the Advisory Committee in paragraph 38 of its report.

41. Mr. Stein (Germany), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

AGENDA ITEM 118: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued) (A/51/32, A/51/125, A/51/253, A/51/268 and Corr.1 and A/51/337)

42. Mr. CAMACHO (Bolivia), speaking on behalf of the members of the Rio Group, said that the Rio Group supported the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 1997 which appeared in the report of the Committee on Conferences and hoped that the Secretariat would make every effort to continue to provide high-quality efficient conference services despite the reduction in resources. The Rio Group endorsed the recommendation in paragraph 21 of the Committee's report, to the effect that the General Assembly should authorize meetings away from Headquarters solely on the basis of a recommendation of the Committee. Such a recommendation was well within the Committee's mandate.

43. With regard to the improved utilization of conference-servicing resources, the statistics provided in paragraph 30 of the Committee's report, which indicated that the overall and average utilization factors were below the benchmark figure of 80 per cent, were a matter of concern. It would seem to be all the more desirable, as proposed in paragraph 46 of the report, for the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences to continue to consult with the chairmen of bodies that had underutilized their conference resources for the past three sessions. The measures recommended in paragraphs 47 and 50 could not but receive support; the same applied to the institutionalization of the dialogue between Conference Services and the secretariats of intergovernmental bodies, as recommended in paragraph 49.

44. The Rio Group attached great importance to paragraph 13 of resolution 50/206 A, which called for the provision, within approved resources, of interpretation services for meetings of regional groups. Since those meetings were a useful tool to facilitate consultations and decision-making in intergovernmental organs, it was a matter of concern to note that 35 per cent of the requests for interpretation services for such meetings had been denied. As the Committee indicated in paragraph 58 of its report, with more rigorous planning on the part of intergovernmental bodies it should be possible to make more effective use of conference services and to reassign part of the resources to meetings of regional groups.

45. The Rio Group regretted that the Secretariat had not been able to submit a detailed report on the development of a cost-accounting system for conference services; it hoped that efforts to develop such a system would continue and would be the subject of a full report at the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

46. With regard to exceptions to the rule that no subsidiary organ could meet at Headquarters during regular sessions of the General Assembly, he said it was important to show some flexibility in the matter, taking into account the venues and services available.

47. On the matter of the control and limitation of documentation, the Rio Group supported the recommendation in paragraph 87 of the report of the Committee on Conferences and thought it would be useful if the Fifth Committee were to be informed of the results of any experience which certain intergovernmental bodies might acquire as a result of the measures referred to in paragraphs 88 and 89. It also supported the recommendations in paragraphs 91 to 96, the aim of which was to turn to good account the most recent advances in computer technology. The Rio Group supported the content of paragraph 101, in which the Committee encouraged the translation services to continue their efforts to improve the quality of translation of documents in all the official languages. If the language services were to be able to carry out their functions while respecting the need for efficiency and quality, it was important that they should have adequate resources. In that connection, the Rio Group shared the concerns expressed by the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences in the letter which he had addressed to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee drawing his attention to the impact which the reductions proposed by the Secretary-General in document A/C.5/50/57 might have on the capacity of Conference Services to carry out mandated activities.

48. The Rio Group was opposed to the idea of recording the informal consultations of intergovernmental bodies; that practice, which was referred to in paragraphs 123 to 125, was contrary to the very principle of informal consultations and he requested clarification as to the precise circumstances in which such recordings had been made.

49. In conclusion, the Rio Group wished to express its appreciation to the staff of Conference Services who, despite the budgetary constraints and the growing demands they had to face, had demonstrated their competence, particularly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Organization.

50. Mr. HO (Singapore), emphasizing the importance which bilateral meetings organized during sessions of the General Assembly had for many small countries and developing countries, welcomed the measures taken by the Secretariat to implement resolutions 49/221 D and 50/206 F, the aim of which was to facilitate such meetings. As a result of the arrangements that had been made, it had been possible to meet the growing demand for premises for such meetings, to the satisfaction of all concerned and at minimal cost to Member States.

51. He then dwelt at length on the anomalies which had marked the conduct of the United Nations expert group meeting on violence against women migrant workers, held in Manila from 27 to 31 May 1996. He stated that a number of procedural irregularities had been committed and that every effort had been made to prevent the views of his delegation from being correctly reflected in the final report of the meeting. He believed that that was a serious breach of the rules governing the holding of United Nations conferences and meetings and he criticized by name the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women, who had represented the Secretariat. He believed that such conduct on the part of a high-level official of the Organization called for action, since it undermined the principle of the impartiality of the Secretariat, which was at the service of all Member States. His delegation reserved the right to take whatever further action it deemed necessary.

52. Mr. Sengwe (Zimbabwe) resumed the Chair.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

53. Ms. PEÑA (Mexico) said that the informal consultations on the financing of the United Nations Missions in Haiti, which she was coordinating, would resume at the beginning of the following week so that the Fifth Committee would be able to take a decision on the matter without delay.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.